

Music 466/566 – Topics in Ethnomusicology:

Music and Documentary Filmmaking

Classes: Tuesday and Thursday 2:00PM – 3:20PM

Location: HC 2-26

Instructor: Federico Spinetti (www.ualberta.ca/~spinetti/)

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Course description

This course examines a variety of experiences, techniques, philosophies and understandings of documentary filmmaking through the specific lens of music. It considers both documentaries about music and the use of music in documentary films on other subjects. Spanning TV productions, art films and film ethnographies, the course draws on film studies, visual anthropology and ethnomusicology to provide an interpretive frame and a critical forum for students to engage thoughtfully with documentary filmmaking. In particular, music will be taken as the vantage point to look at issues of representation in audiovisual media as well as to explore documentary filmmaking as both a creative and a research process. Class instruction will include discussion of assigned readings, and in-class viewings and analyses.

Prerequisites This course is for graduate and advanced undergraduate students. No previous knowledge of music notation, ethnomusicology, music scholarship in general, film studies or visual anthropology is required to take this course and to effectively complete its assignments/requirements.

Objectives

- To familiarize students with the technical and creative process of documentary filmmaking, with an emphasis on issues of representation of real life.
- To encourage students to take up a critical understanding of documentary filmmaking.
- To consider the socio-political, cultural and technological contexts of the production of documentary films, and to appreciate their significance for the making, direction and philosophical approach of specific documentary films.
- To examine the representation of musical life, music making and musicians in documentary films from a variety of periods and artistic/research perspectives.
- To explore documentary filmmaking as a research process, research output and art form, and to assess its significance for the ethnographic study of music.
- To address the role of music soundtrack in the representational and narrative strategies of documentary film.

Requirements/Assignments

- Attendance and participation, including completing weekly readings and participating in class discussions. Completing weekly readings before coming to class is an essential requirement for this course. You may be invited to take turns in leading the discussion on specific readings, topics or in-class film screenings.
- Reading review (500–750 words) of a reading of your choice taken from the bibliography for this course (only readings marked with *). Though short, your review needs to be polished and show some critical acumen. It should summarize the reading in question as well as identify and briefly critique its main arguments and themes. The review is due in Week 4. Unjustified late submissions will be penalized by one full point on the letter

grading scale (i.e. from A to A-, from A- to B+, etc). Please submit your piece by email (in .doc or .docx format).

- Comparative review (500–750 words) of 2 documentary film reviews of your choice. One review must be taken from an ethnomusicology journal (such as *Ethnomusicology*, *Ethnomusicology Forum* or *Yearbook for Traditional Music*), while the other one must be taken from an anthropology journal (such as *Visual Anthropology Review* or *Visual Anthropology*) or film studies journal (such as *Film Criticism*, *Film & History* or *Film Quarterly*). Your review should detect the critical focus, interpretive moves and theoretical interests of the reviewed authors, highlighting similarities and contrasts when relevant. This review is due in Week 7. Unjustified late submissions will be penalized by one full point on the letter grading scale (i.e. from A to A-, from A- to B+, etc). Please submit your piece by email (in .doc or .docx format).
- Film review (undergraduate: 1,000–1,500 words; graduate: 1,500–2,000 words) of one documentary feature film or two to three short/medium length films of your choice. You must choose your film/s from the course filmography. Before undertaking your writing, please discuss with me your film choice. Your review should be polished and show critical acumen. It should provide a synopsis of the film in question and identify and critique its main representational, narrative and stylistic features, with special consideration for how music is used and/or represented. The review is due in Week 10. Unjustified late submissions will be penalized by one full point on the letter grading scale (i.e. from A to A-, from A- to B+, etc). Please submit your piece by email (in .doc or .docx format).
- Film presentation – starting from Week 7, each of you will be required to give one 15-minute class presentation on a film of your choice. This must not be the film chosen for your review and must be chosen from outside the course filmography. In your presentation, you should play some excerpts of the film for the class and comment on the pro-filmic, stylistic, representational, interpretive and narrative choices of the filmmaker, with special consideration for how music is used and/or represented. The time devoted to film excerpts should not exceed that of your commentary. The schedule of presentations will be determined before reading week.
- Final creative/research paper. An original proposal for a documentary film on a subject of interest to you. Like a director, you should describe your chosen topic and reflect on the filmmaking choices with which you would approach your work. You should pay particular attention to illustrating your philosophical/conceptual standpoint, your cinematography and editing choices, your treatment of sound and/or music, and your envisaged working relationships with research subjects (whether participants or places/objects). Your paper should show familiarity with the topics and issues tackled in the course, and draw pertinent connections to and actively engage with course readings and viewings to support and illustrate your choices. Length of paper: undergraduate: 2,500-3,000 words; graduate 3,000-3,500 words. This paper is due on April 20. No unjustified late submissions will be accepted. Please submit your piece by email (in .doc or .docx format).

Assessment

Each assignment will be marked according to the numeric scale of evaluation given below. Individual assignment marks will be combined to obtain a final numeric grade, which will be rounded so as to obtain a corresponding final letter grade as shown below.

A	4.0
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A-	3.7
B+	3.3
B	3.0
B-	2.7
C+	2.3
C	2.0
C-	1.7
D+	1.3
D	1.0
D-	0.7
F	0.0

The relative weight of each assignment on the overall grade is as follows:

Attendance and participation: 10%
Reading review: 15%
Comparative review: 15%
Film review: 20%
Presentation: 15%
Final creative/research paper: 25%

Resources

There are no required textbooks for this course. Class readings will be on reserve at the Music Library or available online through the Library databases. Relevant bibliographic materials that may not be available on reserve will be handed out in class or included in the course mediawiki page (<http://www.fwalive.ualberta.ca/mediawiki>). I will use the course mediawiki to post updated reading assignments and changes of schedule.

Most films viewed in class will be available on reserve at the Music Library or online. The following online film databases will be particularly useful:

- NFB.ca (National Film Board of Canada) [access through UofA Library databases]
- Films on Demand [access through Uof A Library databases]
- Europa Film Treasures [access through Uof A Library databases]
- Culture Unplugged online festivals (www.cultureunplugged.com)

Academic integrity

You should be familiar with the Code of Student Behavior as published in Section 26 of the 2009-2010 Calendar and available online at

<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/governance/studentappeals.cfm>.

"Policy about course outlines can be found in section 23.4(2) of the University Calendar". (GFC 29 SEP 2003)

"The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/governance/studentappeals.cfm>.) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University." (GFC 29 SEP 2003)

Class schedule, topics and (provisional) readings:

Week 1 – Jan 11 and 13: *Introduction to the course: documentary film and music*

Readings: Nichols 1991: chapter 2; Beattie 2008: Introduction.

Week 2 – Jan 18 and 20: *Sound in (documentary) film*

Readings: Chion 1994: pp. 3-9, 73-82, 107-109, and any other parts that interest you.

Week 3 – Jan 25 and 27: *Fine lines I: fiction and documentary*

Readings: Nichols 1991: chapters 4 and 6.

Week 4 – Feb 1 and 3: *Observational cinema and the moving image in Anthropology I*

Readings: Banks & Morphy: chapter 14; Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009: chapters 1, 2 and 4.

February 1: Reading review due

Week 5 – Feb 8 and 10: *Observational cinema and the moving image in Anthropology II*

Readings: Heider: chapter 1; Crawford: chapter 4; Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009: chapter 5.

Week 6 – Feb 15 and 17: *The moving image in Ethnomusicology I*

Readings: Feld 1976; Zemp 1988.

Reading Week – Feb 21 – 25

Week 7 – March 1 and 3: *The moving image in Ethnomusicology II*

Readings: Baily 1989; Baily 2009.

March 1: Review of 2 film reviews due

March 3: presentations 1 & 2

Week 8 – March 8 and 10: *Documentary film and performative action: rockumentary*

Readings: Beattie 2008: chapter 3.

March 8: presentations 3 & 4

March 10: presentations 5 & 6

Week 9 – March 15 and 17: *Werner Herzog, and other experiments with music and documentary*

Readings: Prager 2007; Bachmann 1977.

March 15: presentations 7 & 8

March 17: presentations 9 & 10

Week 10 – March 22 and 24: *Fine lines II: Pontecorvo's The Battle of Algiers and other stories*

Readings: Said 2000; Solinas 1973.

March 22: Film review due

March 24: presentations 11 & 12

Week 11 – March 29 and 31: Evaluation week & screenings.

March 29: presentations 13 & 14

March 31: presentations 15 & 16

Week 12 – April 5 and 7: Ethics in documentary filmmaking

Readings: Ruby 2000: chapter 5; Ruby 1995; Wissler 2009.

April 5: presentations 17 & 18

April 7: presentations 19 & 20

Week 13 – April 12: Final discussion.

April 12: presentations 21 & 22

Final creative/research paper due on April 20th.

Bibliography

- Aufderheide, Patricia. *Documentary film: a very short introduction*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Bachmann, Gideon. "The Man on the Volcano: A Portrait of Werner Herzog." *Film Quarterly*, 31/1, 1977, pp. 2-10.
- * Baily, John. "Filmmaking as Musical Ethnography." *The World of Music*, 31/1, 1989, pp. 3-20.
- Baily, John. *The making of Amir: An Afghan Refugee Musician's Life in Peshawar, Pakistan. The Study Guide*. Boston: Documentary Educational Resources, 1990.
- * Baily, John. "The Art of the 'Fieldwork Movie': 35 Years of Making Ethnomusicological Films." *Ethnomusicology Forum*, Volume 18/1, 2009, pp. 55-64.
- Banks, M. and H. Morphy (eds.). *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Barbash, Ilisa. *Cross-cultural filmmaking: a handbook for making documentary and ethnographic films and videos*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Barnouw, Erik. *Documentary: a history of the non-fiction film*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Barsam, Richard. *Nonfiction film: a critical history*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Beattie, Keith. *Documentary display: re-viewing nonfiction film and video*. London: Wallflower, 2008.
- Bruzzi, Stella. *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Chion, Michel. *Audio-vision: sound on screen*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Chion, Michel. *Film, a sound art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Crawford, P. and D. Turton (eds.). *Film as Ethnography*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992.
- * De Brigard, Emilie. "The History of Ethnographic Film." In Paul Hockings (ed.) *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. 2nd edition. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1995 [1975], pp. 13-43.
- Devereaux, Leslie and Roger Hillman. *Fields of vision: essays in film studies, visual anthropology, and photography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- Fabian, Joannes. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology makes its Other*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.
- * Feld, Steven. "Ethnomusicology and Visual Communication." *Ethnomusicology*, 20/2, 1976, pp. 293-325.
- Grimshaw, Anna and Amanda Ravetz. *Observational cinema: anthropology, film, and the exploration of social life*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- Heider, Karl G. *Ethnographic Film*. Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1976.
- Hewitt, John. *Documentary Filmmaking: a contemporary film guide*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

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- Nichols, Bill. *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Pink, Sarah, László Kürti and Ana Isabel Afonso (eds.). *Working images: visual research and representation in ethnography*. London / New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Prager, Brad. *The cinema of Werner Herzog: Aesthetic Ecstasy and Truth*. London: Wallflower Press, 2007.
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- Solinas, Franco. *Gillo Pontecorvo's The Battle of Algiers*. New York: Scribner, 1973.
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Filmography

- *Altar of Fire*. A film by Robert Gardner and Fritz Staal, 1976. VHS.
- *Amandla: A Revolution in Four Part Harmony*. A film by Lee Hirsch, 2003.
- *Amir: An Afghan Refugee Musician's Life in Peshawar, Pakistan*. A film by John Baily, 1986.
- *An Art of Living: Arab Aesthetics in 9th-Century Spain*. A film by Philippe Calderon and Mahmoud Hussein, 1999.
- *Atumpan*. A film by Mantle Hood, 1964.
- *Breaking the Silence: Music in Afghanistan*. A film by Simon Broughton, 2002.
- *Buena Vista Social Club*. A film by Wim Wenders, 1999.
- *Crossing the Bridge – The Sound of Istanbul*. A film by Fatih Akin, 2005.
- *Dervisi*. A film by Aco Petrovski, 1955.
- *Dhrupad*. A film by Mani Kaul, 1983.
- *Dizzy Gillespie*. A film by Les Blank, 1965.
- *Don't Look Back*. A film by D.A. Pennebaker, 1967.

- *El Corrido Mexicano: Música y Cuernos de Chivo*. A RTVE Production.
- *Galicka Svadba* (Galichnik Wedding). A film by Aco Petrovski, 1955.
- *Gesualdo: Death for Five Voices*. A film by Werner Herzog, 1995.
- *Gimme Shelter*. A film by David and Albert Maysles, 1970.
- *Grizzly man*. A film by Werner Herzog, 2005.
- *Heavy Metal in Baghdad*. A film by Eddy Moretti and Suroosh Alvi, 2007.
- *I know I'm not alone*. A film by Michael Franti, 2006.
- *Koyaanisqatsi: The life out of balance*. A film by Godfrey Reggio, 1982.
- *Latcho Drom*. A film by Tony Gatlif. New Yorker Video, 1993.
- *Les Maîtres fous*. A film by Jean Rouch, 1954.
- *L'Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio*. A film by Agostino Ferrente, 2006.
- *Musique 'Are'are*. A film by Hugo Zemp, 1979 (with study guide).
- *Mystic Iran: the Unseen World*. A film by Aryana Farshad, 2002.
- *Nanook of the North*. A film by John Flaherty, 1998 [original 1922].
- *Naqoyqatsi: Life as War*. A film by Godfrey Reggio, 2002.
- *Petropolis*. A film by Peter Mettler, 2010.
- *Powaqqatsi: Life in Transformation*. A film by Godfrey Reggio, 1988.
- *Prophet Healers of Northern Malawi*. A film by Steven Friedson, 1989. VHS.
- *Ritam i Žvuk*. A film by Trajche Popov, 1955.
- *Roots of Rhythm*. A film by Les Blank, 1990.
- *Soul Power*. A film by Jeff Levy-Hinte, 2008.
- *The Battle of Algiers*. A film by Gillo Pontecorvo, 2010 [original 1966].
- *The Wild Blue Yonder*. A film by Werner Herzog, 2005.
- *Umm Kulthum: A Voice Like Egypt*. A film by Michal Goldman, 1996.
- *War dance*. A film by Sean Fine and Andrea Nix Fine, 2006.
- *When the Road Bends: Tales of a Gypsy Caravan*. A film by Jasmine Dellal, 2006.
- *When We Were Kings*. A film by Leon Gast, 1996.
- *Žurkhaneh – The House of Strength. Music and martial arts of Iran*. A film by Federico Spinetti, 2010.